

Divorce Prevention: Controlled Separation[®]

Smart Marriages
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Basic Forms of Marital Separation

Marriages get into trouble for all kinds of reasons. There are any numbers of books that delve into that information. However, there is a tendency to group separations into one or two categories. For our purposes here we will define separation as any time apart for a married couple. There are differences:

1. *Divorce*- couples misconstrue separation as meaning divorce because the terms are used interchangeably. Emotionally, some couples may be divorced but are still a twosome. Webster Dictionary's official definition is legal end of marriage.
2. *Legal Separation* - court ordered and subject to state regulation.
3. *Situational Separation*
 - a. Permanent Separation- A situation that creates a non-legal separation such as money, kids in school, religion.
 - b. Temporary Separation- business travel or family illness.

The events that create these separations may be brief, intermittent, temporary or ritualized. The parting may be conflicted or subtle. Usually the couple will accept, tolerate or condone these types of separation.

4. *Long Distance Separation*- This type of separation takes a toll on the parties' psyche. (ex. Military service or career choices that offer brief visits to the home.) These long-term partings take a toll on the relationship. Working on separate shifts can be considered long distance.
5. *Transitional Separation*- This form of separation begins when the parties determine divorce is forthcoming. They may continue to live together but in separate homes, or one may leave the home. Couples endure many critical changes in anticipation of divorce. Stress takes its toll because of the changes taking place, i.e. breaking up the household, meeting children's needs, etc.
6. *Experimental Separation*
 - a. Controlled Separation works to reestablish order and stability.
 - b. Trial Separation- An experimental arrangement, planned or unplanned, wherein spouses separate, usually for an undetermined length of time. The decision can be mutual or unilateral, and couple can dwell in separate or in the same house. Often very argumentative. Can be disastrous.

(Sample) Couple Inventory
Please print clearly and complete the following:

Name	Age	Occupation	General Health

Address	Home Phone

Children's Names	Ages

1. Marriage History for both you and your spouse.

2. Separation History. What was that experience like for you?

3. Divorce History. What was that experience like for you?

4. Have you previously participated in a marriage counseling, education or other intervention program?

5. Measured on a scale of 1-10 (1 is low, 10 is high) rate the following:
 How would you rate your marriage currently? _____
 How would you rate yourself as a spouse? _____
 How would you rate your spouse as a partner? _____
 How ambivalent are you? _____

6. What is the presenting problem? Why now?

7. Do you want a divorce?

8. What does a good marriage look like to you?

Couple Inventory Assessment

(Use as a discussion guide with the couple. This begins the collaborative process between you and them. It will help normalize their situation and balance the power in the couple dynamic.)

1. Marriage –
 - # of times (look for serial monogamy)
 - indicates attitude about sense of permanence, team partnership
 - if more than one, what was different? what was same?
 - may indicate need for education & skill building
2. Separation –
 - what worked? what didn't work?
 - look for patterns
 - attitude about progression to divorce
3. Divorce –
 - family of origin
 - different partner
 - same partner
 - attitude (religious, social values)
4. Counseling, education, intervention programs –
 - who, what, where, why, when?
 - what worked? what didn't work?
 - current willingness
5. Measurements –
 - compare & contrast self-evaluated scores
 - get dialogue going – assess communication
6. Presenting problem –
 - what is it?
 - what else?
 - why is this coming to a head now?
7. Love?
 - May not be able to articulate
 - Look for ambivalence
8. Divorce?
 - Current intentions
 - One partner “further gone” than other?
9. Good marriage =
 - insight
 - maturity
 - similar images/views/values

Ambivalence: A client described it as “*Ambivalence is like being in a fog as thick as pea soup.... I'm so unsure of myself.*”

- You lose confidence in yourself & your ability to make even simple decisions
- “I'm damned if I stay and damned if I go.”
- You give up.

- You don't stick up for yourself.
- You're stuck

Breeds: anger, rage, depression, gut-wrenching angst, grief

Triggers: acute stress & may activate illness

Partners become polarized:

- fear of disturbing status quo
- defensive
- competitive
- rigid in beliefs & opinions
- result in "stand-off"/paralysis (can't make a move for fear of being on the losing end of decision)

Elusive & Invested Intimacy:

➤ Elusive intimacy –

- run head on into "aleness", fears of alienation, isolation, rejection
- feel at loose ends
- out of touch w/partner
- question self-worth
- questions worthiness of marriage

➤ Invested Intimacy –

- built on caring
- collaboration
- open communication
- implicit & explicit trust & honesty
- enhances rather than diminishes partner's self-worth

CS gives couples safe space to:

- finally express what's in their hearts & minds
- relieves pressure to act immediately
- make measured decisions

Controlled Separation® Guidelines

1. Time limits – set time frame, preferably three to six months.
2. Legal counsel – neither partner files for divorce during specified time frame.
(if divorce has been filed, hold it up for three to six months.)
3. Moving out – spouses decide which party moves out.
4. Division of home furnishings – fairly distributed as needed.
5. Finances – terms are to be just
6. Children – their welfare is primary (avoids neglect of the children)
7. Pets – how it will be managed/ responsibility details
8. Parameters of couple's continuing relationship.
9. Dating others: “yes” or “no” needs to be specified
10. Confidentiality – avoid gossip – determine what is said and to whom (family/friends); define what is public and what is private
11. Professional Resources: Agree to stop analyzing relationship or discussing what went wrong in the marriage. Assign homework to couple and/or individuals as needed.
12. Homework – agree to do it as requested of the facilitator.
13. Contract: verbal/written. No changes made without consent of both parties.
14. Termination of contract – individual or joint decision.

Sample CS® Contract

1. Time Limits: I agree to a ____month separation commencing on (date)_____ .
2. Legal Counsel: I will/will not contact an attorney in order to become informed. I agree not to make any efforts to file for divorce/will put divorce on hold for 3-6 months during the life of this contract.
3. Living arrangements: _____ will move out on (date)_____ .
4. Dividing Home Furnishings: I agree to cooperatively divide household goods to ensure maximum comfort in our separate living quarters.
5. Finances: I agree to make as few changes in our finances as possible.
6. Children: a.)I agree to flexible and cooperative child-care arrangements. I agree to give 24 hours advance notice for special events.
b.) I agree to develop a timeline and a script for telling the children about the separation.
7. Pet Care: I agree to be flexible and cooperative with care and attention for our pet(s).
8. Couple's Interpersonal Relationship:
 - a. Telephone: I will phone my spouse ____ times weekly for the purpose of _____ I will telephone the children _____times weekly.
 - b. (optional)E-mail: I will e-mail my spouse ____ times weekly for the purpose of _____ . I will e-mail the children _____times weekly.
 - c. Entering Spouse's Residence: _____
 - d. Household Repairs: _____
 - e. Family Outings: _____
 - f. Holidays: _____
 - g. Frequency of Dating and Permissions of Sexual Contact with spouse: (who asks who out first?)

9. Dating Others: I do/do not intend to date others.
10. Confidentiality: Concerning parents and friends – I agree to limit explanations of the details of this contract to discourage unnecessary gossip. I respect that there are both public

and private considerations and agree to what those are. I also agree to refrain from maligning my spouse and will not encourage others to take sides.

11. Professional Resources: I agree to coaching/counseling, and/or mediation if either party is unable to negotiate any of the given terms of this contract in an amicable manner.

12. Homework: I agree to do all homework as assigned with the facilitator.

13. Contract: No changes will be made in this contract unless both partners agree to the terms.

14. Termination of Contract: I agree to inform my spouse verbally or in writing of my intention to terminate this contract.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Chaotic Separation (Old Model)

- Length of time is “open-ended”
- No guidelines
- Someone feels “left”
- No time spent on relationship repair
- Decisions become legal
- Focus on “getting away” from each other
- Emotionally messy and filled with drama
- Often contemptuous, antagonistic, and argumentative
- High degree of stress and uncertainty
- Minimal contact –come together for business only
- “You vs. Me” attitude prevails
- Partners are confused and mates are insecure
- Closure with remorse/regret

Controlled Separation (New Model)

- Agreement structured with specific time limits
- Well-defined guidelines
- Both partners share in decision making and terms
- Roadmap and criteria created for relationship repair
- No legal action taken at this time
- Social time together is built into plan
- Individuals held accountable for behavior and actions showing greater respect and empathy
- Fewer surprises and contract is consciously done together
- Solicit professional help and no “legal” action is taken
- Change “status quo” and upset the “on the cusp” ambivalence
- Shared purpose
- Partners focused and confident
- Closure with relief

This model has been generously influenced by Meg Haycraft of Twogether®, Inc. from Skokie, Illinois. www.twogether.org

RESOURCES

Conscious Divorce, Susan Allison, 2001.

10 Great Dates Before You Say "I Do", David and Claudia Arp and Curt and Natelle Brown, 2002.

Taking Space, Robert Buchicchio, 2006

Getting to Commitment: Overcoming the 8 Greatest Obstacles to Lasting Connection and Finding the Courage to Love, Steven Carter and Julia Sokol (Contributor), 2000.

Making Your Way After Your Parents' Divorce, Lynn Cassella, 2002.

The Four Seasons of Marriage, Gary Chapman, 2007

Take Back Your Marriage, William J Doherty, PhD., 2001.

Getting to Yes: How to Negotiate Agreement Without Giving In, Roger Fisher, 2nd edition, 2003.

Not "Just Friends", Shirley Glass, PhD, 2003.

Fall in Love Stay in Love, Willard Harley, Jr., 2001.

His Needs, Her Needs, Willard Harley, 2001

A Relationship for a Lifetime: Everything You Need to Know, Kelly Johnson, MD. 2001.

The Book of Marriage: The Wisest Answers to the Toughest Questions, Dana Mack and David Blankenhorn, 2001.

Between Two Worlds, Elizabeth Marquardt, 2005

The Love List (Eight Things That Make A Big Difference In Your Marriage), Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott, 2002

The Starter Marriage, Pamela Paul, 2002.

When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times, Chodron Pema, 2000.

Divorce and Beyond, Elsie Radtke, James Greteman, Leon Haverkamp, 2004

Should I Stay or Go? How Controlled Separation Can Save Your Marriage, Lee Raffel, 1997.

The Monogamy Myth: A Personal Handbook for Dealing with Affairs, Peggy Vaughan, 2003.

The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce, Judith Wallerstein and Julia Lewis, 2000.

INTERNET WEBSITES

Relationship Education & Enhancement:

www.smartmarriages.com (up-to-date education, research & resources)
www.patlove.com (excellent articles on relationships)
www.imagotherapy.com (a program to enrich, resurrect relationships)
www.familytrack.com (strengthening marriage and families)
www.marriagetools.com (articles & suggestions to maintain relationships)
www.marriagealive.com (articles, resources, e-newsletter)
www.pairs.com (create a passionate, lasting relationship)
www.prepinc.com (prevention & relationship enhancement program)
www.realtionshipinstitute.com (self-help marriage enrichment)
www.retrouvaille.org (when you find yourselves in a stuck place)
www.familyministries.org (Archdiocese of Chicago Family Ministry Office)

Divorce/Separation:

www.divorcemagazine.com
www.divorcesupport.com
www.divorce.com
www.divorcesource.com
www.womansdivorce.com
www.divorcetransitions.com
www.familyministries.org